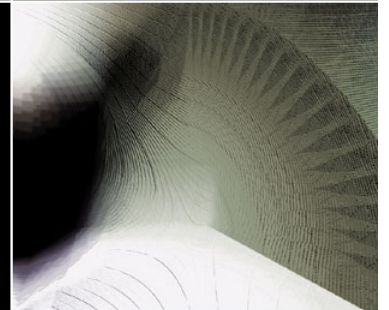


**French, Erica L. and Tracey, Noel P. and Ng, Connie (2007)
Embedding a 'Critical Thinking' Process Throughout the Learning
and Teaching of Organisation Theory. In Proceedings Effective
Teaching and Learning Conference 2007, Brisbane, Australia.**

Copyright 2007 (The authors)

Embedding a 'critical thinking' process throughout the learning and teaching of organisation theory.

By: Dr Erica French
Mr Noel Tracey *
Ms Connie Ng



Outline

- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Results
 - Focus groups
 - University survey data
- Implementation
- Discussion

Introduction

- Need for 'job ready' graduates
- Students questioning content relevance
- Increasing use of core competencies and/or graduate capabilities lists
- Many similarities in capabilities lists - the need for 'critical thinking'
- Critical thinking fundamental to managerial decision making

"Critical Thinking"

- Many conflicting definitions
- Developing pedagogy depends on the definition:
 - Reflective Practice? (Ivie 2001)
 - Focus on logic and evidence based causal argument? (Begley 2006)
 - Meta-cognition? (Paul 1990)
- Discipline focus is fundamental
- Students find difficulty in transferring critical thinking skills

Literature Review

- Developing critical thinking depends on:
 - How it is taught, not what is taught
- Content knowledge of CT is fundamental to learning
- Must be integrated with discipline knowledge
- Overcoming 'defensiveness' is key

Literature Review_(cont.)

- Some key similarities in the literature:
 - Students need:
 - An understanding of the basic theory of critical thinking
 - Given ample practice
 - In an active learning environment

How critical is it?

"Very few really seek knowledge in this world. Mortal or immortal, few really ask. On the contrary, they try to wring from the unknown the answers they have already shaped in their own minds – justification, explanations, forms of consolation without which they can't go on. To really ask is to open the door to the whirlwind. The answer may annihilate the question and the questioner."

(The Vampire Marius, *The Vampire Lestat*, by Anne Rice (cited by Facione, 2004))

Context

- Organisation Theory Unit
MGB222 – Managing Organisations
- Complex, dynamic environments
- Difficult nature of management decision making for organisational effectiveness

Methodology

- Quantitative/Qualitative approach
 - Depth of information
 - Breadth of opinion
- Survey 70+students - 3 questions
- Semi-structured focus groups:
 - One per semester (n=2)
 - 6-8 participants
 - Offered free movie voucher and pizza
- Use of University student survey data
- Use of Examination results

Findings – Focus groups

- Identified four major themes:
 - A perceived gap between learning and practice
 - Believed the unit should teach 'how to become managers' yet felt unable to apply that learning
 - Difficulty with the current text
 - Not challenging enough
 - More structure in tutorials
 - Need for direction in case learning to reinforce discipline theory and critical thinking process
 - 'Critical thinking' seen as another form of problem solving
 - More formalisation from a learning perspective

Findings – Class Survey

- Identified three major themes
 - Liked lectures but wanted direction in studying for the exam and critical essay development
 - Recognised and liked examples/videos and cases in lectures and tutorials but wanted more of them
 - Strong positive feedback on lecturer and tutors but wanted more disciplined process rather than “open discussion” in tutorials

Findings - University Student Survey

- Pre change:

- N=180 n=22 = 12.2% response rate
- Overall unit evaluation = 3.2

- Post change:

- N=153 n=43 = 30% response rate
- Overall unit evaluation = 3.6

Essay Results

- Pre Change:

- N=213

- Mean = 62%

- Std = 17.8

- Post Change

- N=137

- Mean = 70%

- Std = 18

Implementation

- Developed tutorial guide – contains:
 - Unit framework
 - Weekly Case studies; Experiential exercises;
 - Reflective opportunities
 - Learning notes based on critical thinking process
 - All linked to specific critical thinking skills (Facione, 2004)
 - Interpretation
 - Analysis
 - Evaluation
 - Inference
 - Explanation
 - Self-regulation
 - Linked to essay writing development process critical thinking skills with CRA
 - Discussion questions linked to lectures
- Linked lectures and new text with critical thinking process through authentic workplace examples

Discussion

- Built the critical thinking process into 'real world' management examples
- Included wide range of activity (videos; cases; and experiential exercises) in lectures and tutorials with time for focussed discussions and self reflections
- Linked to Student Portfolio
- Improved feedback in comments on university student survey and end semester
- BUT, at the beginning of semester students are unsupportive

Conclusions

- Limits – one unit; incomplete research to date – more to be done
- Directions – to ensure student development in critical thinking through a group of management units to encourage longer term learning development
- Worth doing from a student perspective but also from a lecturer/tutor perspective – more interesting experience for all

Thank you

Questions?